

9
The popish doctrine of auricular
confession and priestly absolution
considered.

A
SERMON 9

693.d.7

PREACHED AT

SALTERS-HALL,

MARCH 13, MDCCXXXIV.

By JOSEPH BURROUGHS.



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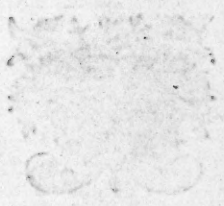
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JOHN XX. 21, 22, 23.

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you ;
as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.
And when he had said this, he breathed on them,
and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost ;
whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted un-
to them ; and whosoever sins ye retain, they
are retained.



THE province assign'd to me is to
treat of *auricular confession* and
priestly absolution : the former of
which is one of the first things re-
quired in the Romish *sacrament*
of penance, and the other the
completion of it. I have chosen for the foun-
dation of my discourse that text, on which the
greatest stress is laid with regard to the power
of absolution : and this will naturally bring in
all those things which are preparatory to it.

In my discourse I propose,

I. To set forth, from authentic records, the
doctrine of the church of *Rome* on these heads.

II. To examine the ground upon which they
herein proceed.

I. To set forth, from authentic records, the doctrine of the church of *Rome* on the heads of *auricular confession* and *priestly absolution*.

Now nothing can be more authentic in this case than the council of *Trent*. And this council declares concerning the sacrament of penance in general; * ‘ That our Lord then chiefly instituted it, when being raised from the dead he *breathed on his disciples, saying, Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted to them; and whosesoever ye retain, they are retained.* In which so remarkable a fact and in so clear expressions (*they affirm*) the power of remitting and retaining sins, in order to the reconciling of the faithful, who have lapsed after baptism, was communicated to the apostles and their legitimate successors.’ It is plain, that they here ascribe to *the apostles and their legitimate successors*, (who in the 6th chap. of the same session are explained to be *bishops and priests*) the power of *remitting and retaining sins* in the literal sense. For † they speak of *penance* as ‘ a sacrament appointed for the remission of sins; a remedy of life to those who after baptism should deliver up themselves into the slavery of sin and power of the devil; by which sacrament (*they say*) the benefit of Christ’s death is applied to those who lapse after baptism.’ And, to make the matter fully clear, they frankly acknowledge; ‡ ‘ that the form of the sacrament of penance, in which chiefly its force lies, consists in those words of
‘ the

* Concil. Trident. Sess. XIV. cap. 1.

† Ibid.

‡ Cap. 3.

‘ the minister, *I absolve thee*; and that the
 ‘ prayers, which according to the custom of
 ‘ holy church are laudably added, do not at all
 ‘ belong to the essence of the form, (*they are the
 council’s own words*) ‘ nor are necessary to the
 ‘ administration of the sacrament itself.’

Having thus laid the foundation of their sacrament in priestly absolution; they make no doubt to build upon it the necessity of confession to the priest, in order to his granting the absolution desired. For they affirm; * ‘ that in the
 ‘ very institution of this sacrament of penance,
 ‘ as before explained, there was likewise instituted by our Lord an intire confession of sins:
 ‘ and that such confession is *jure divino* necessary
 ‘ to all those who fall into sin after baptism;
 ‘ because, (if you will take their word for it)
 ‘ our Lord Jesus Christ, when he was going to
 ‘ ascend from earth to heaven, left the priests his
 ‘ vicars, as *presidents* and *judges*, before whom
 ‘ all mortal sins into which the faithful might
 ‘ fall should be brought, to the end that, according to the power of the keys for remitting or retaining of sins, they might pronounce
 ‘ sentence.’ And agreeably hereto, they have the confidence to speak of the confessor’s chair as † ‘ *a tribunal*, before which the lapsed are to
 ‘ be sifted as criminals, that by the sentence
 ‘ of the priest they may be deliver’d from their
 ‘ sins.’ Nay, they are so clear in this point, as to affirm, ‡ ‘ that a priest who is under
 ‘ the guilt of mortal sin may by virtue of
 ‘ the

* Sess. XIV. cap. 5.

† Cap. 2.

‡ Cap. 6.

‘ the holy Spirit conferr’d on him in his
 ‘ ordination, as a minister of Christ, exer-
 ‘ cise the function of remitting sins.’ For
 which they assign this admirable reason : ‘ that
 ‘ tho’ the absolution of a priest is the dispensing
 ‘ of a benefit which proceeds from another ; yet
 ‘ it is not a meer naked ministry, either of
 ‘ preaching the gospel, or of declaring that sins
 ‘ are forgiven ; but is to be considered as a *judi-
 ‘ cial action*, in which a sentence is pronounced
 ‘ by him in quality of a *judge*.’ Now ‘ this
 ‘ judgment,’ they wisely * observe, ‘ the priest
 ‘ could not exercise without taking cognizance
 ‘ of the cause ; nor maintain equity in enjoining
 ‘ punishments, if the penitents should declare
 ‘ to him their sins only in general, and not in a
 ‘ special and particular manner.’ From whence
 they collect, (and the whole superstructure of
 this doctrine of auricular confession is meer col-
 lection and inference from a perverted text of
 scripture which is laid as the foundation) † that
 ‘ penitents ought in confession to recount all
 ‘ mortal sins, even the most secret, of which
 ‘ they are conscious after a diligent discussion ;
 ‘ and likewise, for the reasons before mentioned,
 ‘ all those particular circumstances which alter
 ‘ the kind of sin.’

As to the manner of confessing in secret before
 the priest alone ; they have the assurance to af-
 firm, that ‡ ‘ this sacramental confession had
 ‘ been used by holy church from the beginning,
 ‘ and always commended by the most holy and
 ‘ most ancient fathers.’ But they are more con-
 siderate

* Sess. XIV. cap. 5.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

considerate than to offer at any proof earlier than the fourth *Lateran* council, held in the year MCCXV; which seems to have been the first that * enjoin'd this confession to be practis'd once every year. They might indeed have quoted a † provincial council in *France*, held about the year DCL, which declared 'repentance of sins, which 'is the remedy of the soul, to be useful to all'; and decreed, that 'penance should by the priests 'be appointed to penitents upon their confession.' But if they could have quoted much more early, or more considerable testimonies than this, from any of those *most holy and most ancient fathers*, of whom they were so wise as to speak only in general terms; yet it wou'd have availed nothing in this case, where scripture and common sense are against them.

It has been already observed, that the ‡ council of *Trent* makes an intire confession of sins, (that very confession, which in the same sentence they require should be made by a priest in the quality of *president* and *judge*) to be *jure divino* necessary to all those who fall into sin after baptism. But they are yet more particular and more terrible. For in the sixth canon they 'anathematize all those who shall deny that 'sacramental confession is *jure divino* necessary 'to salvation:' and in the seventh, 'all those 'who shall venture to say, that in the sacrament 'of penance it is not *jure divino* necessary to 'the remission of sins to confess all and every 'mortal

* Conqil. Lateran. cap. 21. apud *Labbé*, Tom. XI. par. 1. edit. *Par.* 1671. pag. 172, 173.

† Conqil. Cabilon. can. 8. apud *Labbé*, Tom. VI. pag. 389.

‡ Sess. XIV. cap. 5.

‘ mortal sin, even the most secret, which can
 ‘ with diligent premeditation be call’d to mind;
 ‘ together with the circumstances which change
 ‘ the kind of sin?’ in the ninth, ‘ all those who
 ‘ shall deny priestly absolution to be a *judicial*
 ‘ *act* :’ and in the tenth, ‘ all those who shall
 ‘ deny, that priests under mortal sin have the
 ‘ power of binding and loosing; or affirm, that
 ‘ any other than priests are the ministers of ab-
 ‘ solution.’

And these things I take notice of the rather,
 because of a most unlucky circumstance, with
 which this whole affair is attended; which is
 the making the priest’s good intention neces-
 sary to the salutary effect of the absolution he
 gives. This is cautiously expressed in one of the *
 canons of the *Trent* council: which ‘ ana-
 ‘ thematizes any man who shall affirm, that
 ‘ sins are remitted to him who confesses them,
 ‘ when the priest absolves not in earnest, but
 ‘ in jest.’ And one wou’d think, by the cau-
 tiousness of the expression, that the fathers of
 that council had found themselves hard press’d
 with this doctrine of the necessity of the priest’s
 good intention: which it is certain hangs like
 a millstone about the neck of all the Romish
 sacraments; and renders it impossible for a
 Romanist to prove, that there is at this day
 any such thing as a priest, or indeed a christian,
 in the world; because no man can certainly tell,
 whether the person from whom he received or-
 ders, or baptism, perform’d the service with the
 intention which the church requires. For thus
 pope

* Sefs. XIV. can. 9.

† pope *Eugene* IV, in his decree at the council of *Florence*, held about the year MCCCCXL, expressly declares : ‘ All these sacraments, (*i. e.* all the seven, among which that of penance is particularly mentioned) are made up of these three parts : ‘ that is to say ; of things, as the matter ; of ‘ words, as the form ; and of the person of the ‘ minister who confers the sacrament, with the ‘ intention of doing that which the church ‘ does : of which three if any one be wanting, ‘ the sacrament is not perfected.’ But indeed the council of *Trent* itself speaks plainly enough of this matter, to deserve to be charged with all the impious consequences which follow this doctrine. For they expressly tell their penitents ;† ‘ that they ought not so to flatter themselves concerning their own faith, as to think ‘ that they are absolved truly and before God, ‘ when the priest has not a mind to act seriously ‘ and absolve truly.’ Monstrous impiety ! and most unhappy penitents ! to whom no humiliation before an offended God, no satisfaction made to an injured neighbour, no resolution or endeavours of amendment, no real reformation of heart and life, nor all these together, can avail any thing, without the good-will of the priest ! and whom, according to this detestable doctrine, God himself cannot absolve from sin, unless the priest too, when he pretends to absolve in words, is so good as to do it with the serious intention of his heart !

But besides the confession, of which I have been treating, and besides that contrition which

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is

* *Labbé*, Tom. XIII. pag. 535.

† *Sess.* XIV. cap. 6.

is to attend it ; there is another thing insisted on by the church of *Rome*, before she will allow her priests to exercise their good intentions in giving absolution. Certain punishments are, at the priest's discretion, enjoin'd to the penitents, under pretence of * making them more diligent for the future. These they call *satisfaction*; and make them a necessary part of their sacrament of penance; as necessary as contrition or confession. For the institutes of their canon law expressly tell us†, ' that neither contrition nor confession avail much, unless to both these be added satisfaction ;' which in the same sentence is called ' a sort of compensation for an injury done.' And the council of *Trent* speaks as effectually as can be to the same purpose, when it ‡ anathematizes ' those who shall deny, that contrition, confession and satisfaction are all of them necessary in the sacrament of penance to the intire and perfect remission of sins.' Now, this satisfaction, the || council of *Florence* frankly tells you, is to be made *secundum arbitrium sacerdotis*, ' according to the will and pleasure of the priest, tho' chiefly by prayer and fasting, and alms.' Let it therefore be called ' a satisfaction made unto God through Jesus Christ ;' as it is by the council of *Trent* ;** and let it be colour'd over ever so plausibly with the appearances of religion : yet as long as the appointing of this satisfaction is solely in the will and pleasure of the priest, it is plain that the
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* Concil. Trid. Sess. XIV. cap. 8.

† Lib. II. tit. 5.

‡ Sess. XIV. can. 4.

|| *Labbé*, Concil. tom. XIII. pag. 538.

** Sess. XIV. cap. 9.

great concern is made the satisfying of him : if he be not well satisfied, there is no absolution to be had. If the penitent is not to the full as liberal to the church, and (I may add) to the priest in particular, as the priest himself thinks he should be ; let him break his heart with contrition, and run ever so great a risque by exposing his secret sins and his most important affairs in confession ; yet it all signifies nothing. Indeed effectual care is taken by the council of *Trent* to make the penitents liberal. For they plainly tell the priests,* ‘ that they ought, as far as the Spirit and prudence shall suggest, to enjoin salutary and suitable satisfactions, according to the quality of the crimes, *and the ability of the penitents* : lest if they shou’d connive at the sins confess’d, and deal too indulgently with the penitents, enjoining the slightest works for the greatest crimes, they should become partakers of other mens sins.’

Thus important are the priests made : who by the church of *Rome* are constituted *judges* and *arbiters* in the whole affair of repentance ; even with regard to many things which one would think should be transacted between the penitent himself and God alone.

But it must be observ’d ; that to keep the people the more effectually in subjection, there are some extraordinary cases reserved to the decision of the pope, and to bishops in their respective dioceses ; concerning which the common priests are not allowed to judge. Only in the article of death there is no reservation ;

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and

* Sess. XIV. cap. 8.

and therefore in that case, ' all priests are allowed to absolve any penitent from any kind ' of sins and censures.' So says the * council of *Trent*. And so the Roman ritual, † published by authority of pope *Paul V* : prescribing in that case only this short form ; *I absolve thee from all censures and sins, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen.* The forms of absolution in ordinary cases are longer ; and the stress is openly laid, not upon that part wherein the priest ' prays that God would have ' mercy upon the penitent, and, forgiving his ' sins, guide him to eternal life ;' for this, and another form to the same purpose, the priest is ‡ expressly told he may omit : but upon the following form, which I shall take the liberty to repeat. || *Our Lord Jesus Christ absolve thee : and I, by his authority, do absolve thee, from every bond of excommunicaton, † [suspension] and interdict, so far as I am able, and thou standest in need. Moreover I absolve thee from all sins in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen.* To this form is usually join'd another ; which for its irreverence to our blessed Saviour, and contrariety to his doctrine, I cannot tell how to look upon as any thing better than antichristian : in these words. ** *The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ ; the merits of the blessed virgin Mary and of all the saints ; whatsoever good thou hast done ; and whatsoever evil thou hast suffered ;*

* Sess. XIV. cap. 7.

† Ritual. Rom. edit. 8vo. Antwerp. 1635. pag. 67.

‡ Ibid.

|| Ritual. pag. 66.

† N. B. This word [suspension] is added only in case the penitent be a clergyman.

** Pag. 67.

fered; be unto thee for remission of sins, increase of grace, and reward of eternal life. Amen.

There are particular forms and measures appointed by the ritual for restoring of persons excommunicate to the communion of the faithful. There is likewise a method provided for absolving the dead, if in their life time they had given signs of contrition. But I will not detain you with the * recital.

I cannot

* I shall take the liberty to offer to my reader what would have been too tedious from the pulpit. Among the measures for restoring a living excommunicate; the penitent, if his crime be very great, is to take an oath, that he will obey the commands of the church which shall be laid upon him on that account: and especially, that he will not thenceforward ever offend against that canon or decree, for the violating whereof he has incurr'd censure. Then he is to kneel down on both knees, and upon the shoulder, cover'd only with his shirt, (if it be a man) to be lash'd gently by the priest with a rod or cords, till the priest has recited a whole psalm appointed for that purpose. Then, after several prayers and responses, during which the priest is to be uncovered, he at length sits down, covers his head, and delivers a form, wherein he declares; that ' he, by the authority of Jesus Christ, ' join'd with that of the pope, or the bishop, or other superior ' concern'd in the affair, does absolve him from his excommunication, in the name of the Father,' &c. *Ritual.* pag. 68, 69. In order to the absolution of the dead excommunicate; the body, if not yet buried, is to be beaten, and absolved, and then suffer'd to be buried in consecrated ground: if buried in a profane place, to be dug up, and after the same ceremonies to be buried in holy ground: but if it cannot conveniently be dug up, then the burying place is to be beaten, instead of the dead body: if buried in holy ground, then only the sepulchre to be beaten. During which beating, whether of the body or the sepulchre, the priest is to pronounce a certain form of words, and have responses made to him. After which follows the form of absolution, in these words: *I do, according to the authority granted to me, absolve thee from the bond of excommunication which thou hast incurred, [or art declared to have incurred] for such a fact; and restore thee to the communion of the faithful: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.* And then the whole work is concluded with prayers and responses. *Ritual.* pag.

I cannot dismiss this ritual without observing; that it directs the priests * ‘ to ask *prudent* ‘ *questions* in such cases where the penitent does ‘ not express the number, the kinds, and the ‘ necessary circumstances of his sins:’ and that tho’ † it bids them take heed that they do not ‘ detain the penitents with curious or unprofitable ‘ questions, especially the younger people of ei- ‘ ther sex, or other persons, concerning things ‘ which they are ignorant of; lest they should ‘ thereby take offence and learn to sin:’ yet the penitent is intirely at the mercy of the priest whether he shall be asked such questions or not: that it is notorious these things are often done, to the violation of all rules of modesty and decency; and such thoughts of any kind suggested by the wicked priests, as may best serve the purposes of their lewdness, avarice, or malice: and that in the circumstances in which confession is establish’d by the church of *Rome*, there is no way to prevent such evils.

The effect of this sacrament of penance, (the ‡ council of *Trent* tells us) ‘ with regard to its ‘ force and efficacy, is reconciliation with God:’ agreeably to what they had affirmed a little before; ‘ that || the power of remitting and retain- ‘ ing sins was given to bishops and priests for that ‘ purpose;’ and ‘ that ** this their sacrament is ‘ necessary to the salvation of those who have ‘ sinned after baptism.’

Thus I have set forth from authentic records the doctrine of the church of *Rome* concerning auricular confession and priestly absolution: in the

* Ritual. pag. 63.

‡ Sess. XIV. cap. 3.

† Pag. 63, 64.

|| Cap. 2.

** Ibid.

the doing which I could not avoid adding some other things relating to their sacrament of penance, which are necessarily connected with these two articles. If I have drawn out the account into too great a length, it was because I feared that a very brief relation would not give you a sufficient notion of doctrines, which you would wonder should ever enter the minds of profess'd christians. The setting them forth thus largely will, I hope, in the minds of protestants, who are acquainted with their bible, and acknowledge that for the only rule of their faith, go a good way towards a confutation, and thereby shorten my remaining work. However, I beg leave, according to my proposed method,

II. To examine the ground, upon which the church of *Rome* herein proceeds.

And here it will be necessary to consider attentively those texts of scripture, upon which they lay a stress in this argument : for they are forced in this case to have recourse to scripture, because they know that the common sense and reason of mankind are against them : and they are glad to catch at any plausible appearances, arising from a perversion of single difficult passages, detach'd from such as wou'd sufficiently explain them ; because they know, that a fair comparison of one part of scripture with another wou'd turn to their confusion.

But I cannot forbear observing what a meer farce the council of *Trent* acts, in appealing to scripture at all, for the support of their doctrine of confession and absolution ; when they
had

had before laid it down as a rule, ' that it be-
 ' longs to * mother church alone to judge of
 ' the true sense of holy scripture ; and decreed,
 ' that no person whatever, trusting to his own
 ' prudence, in matters of faith or manners, be-
 ' longing to the edification of christian doctrine,
 ' wresting the scripture to his own sense, should
 ' dare to interpret the holy scripture contrary to
 ' that sense which holy mother church hath
 ' held and doth hold, or contrary to the una-
 ' nimous consent of the fathers.' What a
 farce, I say, is it, after all this, to appeal to
 scripture ? For if the decrees of the *Trent* council
 were ever designed to be of any use to the com-
 mon people, (and if they were not, why do the
 fathers of that council, in their canons, oblige
 all without exception, under the penalty of a
 severe curse, to receive their doctrine ?) if, I say,
 they were design'd to be of any use to the peo-
 ple, the quoting of scripture can never answer
 any such purpose ; because the common people
 can make no judgment at all about it, for want
 of knowing *what sense holy mother church has al-*
ways put upon scripture, and what has been *the*
unanimous consent of the fathers with relation to
 it. Nay, even if the decrees of this council were
 design'd only for the use of the priests, as one
 would be tempted to think they were : yet to
 what purpose is it to quote scripture ? when, by
 appropriating *to the church alone* the right of in-
 terpreting scripture, they have taken it out of
 the power even of the priests to judge for them-
 selves : besides that it is as impossible for the
 priests

* Sefs. IV.

priests as the people to know *the unanimous consent of the fathers*; since it is well known that the fathers have differ'd very much in their judgments from each other.

But since notwithstanding these things they do pretend to shew respect to scripture, where they think it may serve their turn; let us examine whether the texts they produce can support the weight they lay upon them.

They tell us: 'our * Lord then chiefly instituted the sacrament of penance, when being raised from the dead he *breathed upon his disciples, and said; Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins soever ye remit, they are remitted, and whose soever ye retain, they are retained.*' And upon this text therefore they chiefly ground the power of the priest's authoritative absolution, and the necessity of auricular confession.

But nothing besides their usurped power of interpreting for all the christian world, could enable them to impose such a sense as this upon our Saviour's words. If it were true, that this was our Lord's mind with regard to the apostles themselves, the contrary to which I think is evident; yet how will this convey to the ordinary priests, in all succeeding ages, a power of granting authoritative absolutions at their own discretion; or of claiming a particular confession of secret sins in order thereto? When Christ *breathed upon the apostles*, as a token of conferring the Holy Ghost upon them, did he at the same time breathe upon all the priests that were to come into the world? Did he by the

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* Concil. Trident. Sess. XIV. cap. 1.

same action, or indeed by any other, convey the Holy Ghost to them? Did he give to them, or even to bishops themselves, all the same powers which he gave to the apostles?

It is evident that the words in question were spoken to the apostles, and to them alone, on the day when our Saviour arose from the dead: and we are to judge, by the circumstances of the persons to whom they were delivered, as well as by the words themselves, whether our Lord meant to apply them to any other than their own persons.

To the apostles it was said with great propriety: *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.* For this was an immediate and extraordinary mission of the apostles by our Lord Jesus Christ; as was that of Christ himself by his heavenly Father; tho' there was an unspeakable difference in the dignity of the persons sent, and in the extensiveness of the work. However, here was full power given by Christ to his apostles, to perform the work assigned to them; as there was by the Father to the Son, for the service in which he was to be employ'd. But will any man therefore affirm, that hereby were convey'd to bishops and priests in succeeding ages all the powers convey'd to the apostles? As well might he affirm, that the apostles did in this their mission from Christ receive all those powers with which Christ himself was invested, and that they were sent to do in all respects the same work.

But not to insist any longer on these introductory words; I proceed to those immediately following,

following, upon which the great stress is laid. *And when he had said this, he breathed on them; and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained.*

Now, make as little allowance as you please for the strong figurative manner of speaking in the eastern countries; yet do but allow that Christ understood what he was doing while he spoke these words, and I will appeal to you, or indeed to any man living, whether he cou'd possibly extend them to that sense, which you have seen the church of *Rome*, and particularly the council of *Trent*, ascribes to them. Can our Lord, by any construction of these words, be supposed to have left priests his vicars, as ' *pre-*
' *sidents* and *judges*, before whom all mortal
' sins into which the faithful might fall should
' be brought, that according to the power of
' the keys for remitting or retaining sins they
' might pronounce sentence?' Can any man
believe, that in order hereunto ' there was vir-
' tually instituted by the same words an intire
' confession of sins to the priest;' and a power
likewise conferred to enjoin what penances he
should think fit, and then to say to the peni-
tent, *I absolve thee?* Can any man really believe,
that our Lord design'd such a process should have
the effects which the council of *Trent* ascribes
to it? particularly, that hereupon should follow
' reconciliation with God;' and that yet it
should not be in the power of God to be recon-
ciled to the penitent, where the priest happen'd

to with-hold his good intentions when he pronounced the words of absolution ?

It is impossible, I say, that such things as these should ever have been in our Lord's intention : and particularly impossible, that he should have given to men the power of dispensing pardons in an arbitrary manner. The Son of God can never be suspected of giving any such power ; since it would be inconsistent with the power of the divine Being himself : for besides what is to be said concerning frail mortal men in general, subject to passions and prejudices and mistakes ; and besides that it is well known, thousands of priests are stupidly ignorant, of the christian religion, and almost of every thing else ; it is certain, that wicked men (such as the council of *Trent* must acknowledge *priests under mortal sin* to be) might be erroneous enough to dispense pardons, where an all-wise and perfectly holy God, even with all his infinite mercy, would see good reason to refuse them.

It is indeed hard to conceive, how any man should in earnest believe these things. But this interpretation of our Saviour's words gives such an accession of power to the Romish bishops and priests ; that any one, who observes their numerous incroachments in other respects, cannot much wonder they should insist upon it. But they have no other way to make such interpretations pass, than by detaching single sentences from their context ; making no comparison with other texts which wou'd explain them ; following, as in the case of transubstantiation, the strict literal sense, where it is most evident that
sense

sense cou'd never be intended ; and making no allowance for figures of speech, where it is most evident they were designed ; nor any consideration of the character and circumstances of the persons speaking or spoken to.

It is easy to darken any expressions whatever by such methods as these, and to give them a sense altogether different from what the speaker or writer intended ; whereas if we will take fair and candid measures of interpretation, a clear light may be thrown upon passages which have really some obscurity in them. Thus, with regard to the words of our text : if we will make allowance for the figurative manner of expression ; compare the passage with others which have a manifest relation to it ; and consider how the apostles themselves understood it, by the tenor of their writings and conduct after they receiv'd this commission : we shall find the meaning to be something very different from the forced interpretation of the council of *Trent*. We shall find ; that when our Saviour *breathed on his apostles, and said to them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost ; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted to them ; and whosoever ye retain, they are retained* ; his meaning was to assure them, that they should receive that infallible guidance and assistance of the Holy Ghost, which should enable them, without any danger of mistake, to publish among men the terms upon which sinners should be pardoned, and upon the rejection whereof their sins should remain unforgiven. And hence indeed it will follow ; that whoever shall in succeeding ages comply with those

those terms, though declared by uninspired men, shall receive the benefit of God's gracious pardon; and that they who reject those terms shall go without forgiveness. The effect therefore, of *having sins remitted or retained*, will in all ages of the church follow upon men's complying or not complying with the terms, which the Holy Ghost, conferred on the apostles, enabled them infallibly to make known; and consequently does not depend upon those terms being declared by a priest, any more than by a layman. If any man whatever, whether in holy orders or not, can be so happy as *to convert a sinner from the error of his way*, by bringing him to a due sense of it, and persuading him to comply with those terms of pardon and acceptance, which the apostles were enabled infallibly to publish; *he shall save a soul from death, and shall bide a multitude of sins*. Thus we are expressly assured by one of the apostles themselves; the apostle James, chap. V. 20. And that this prospect is not confined to ministers, or persons in holy orders, appears from the address in the preceding verse, to all *the brethren*, to whom the epistle is directed; *i. e. * to the twelve tribes scattered abroad*. To all these the apostle addresses himself, when he says, *Brethren, if ANY OF YOU do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he shall save a soul from death*.

I cannot forbear observing by the bye; that the case here specified, that of *brethren erring from the truth, and turning from that error*,

* Chap. I. ver. 1.

is the very case of *the lapsed after baptism*; in which the church of *Rome* pretends their sacrament of penance does *jure divino* necessarily take place. And yet the apostle is so far from intimating any necessity of confession to a priest, or of such satisfactions as he shall enjoin, or of receiving absolution from his mouth; that without any difference between priest and people, he directs his discourse to the *brethren* in general, and encourages them with the hope, that any of them, if they will use their endeavours, may be so happy as to *convert a sinner from the error of his way, and thereby save a soul from death*.

And, I beseech you, what is *saving a soul from death*? Is it a whit less than *remitting of sins*, which is the phrase in our text? Yet both the one and the other is, we see, in the phraseology of scripture, ascribed to men, who are only the instruments of this *remission* and *salvation*, by persuading their brethren to comply with the gospel methods, to which *remission* and *salvation* are promised; whereas, in strictness of speech, it is certain that none but God can *save the soul from death*, any more than *remit sins*.

How evident is it, from this one passage of *St. James*, that allowance is to be made for figures of speech? How evident indeed is the necessity of this allowance in all writings, and even in conversation? And how much more frequent are strong figures of speech in the oriental writings, than in others? And how visible is it, that the scriptures abound with such manners

ners of expression ; which yet, by the circumstances wherein they are delivered, are easy enough to be understood ? If it be objected, that it is hard to suppose this should be done in the delivery of a commission ; the objection is easily answered from precedents in the old testament ; where the prophets are, in receiving their commission, told by the Most High himself, and without any danger of mistaking his meaning, that they are sent to do those very things, which 'tis plain they are only sent to declare. There is no need of quoting to this purpose any more than that one remarkable passage, *Jer. I. 9, 10. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms ; to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, and to build, and to plant.*

Will the Romanists say, that the prophet was to do all these things in the literal sense ? Or will they pretend, that these words, together with the context from *ver. 5.* signify any more, than that *Jeremiah* was chosen of God, and by him perfectly furnished, and after an extraordinary manner sent forth, to declare his mind and will to the nations ; and that the declarations so made should have their effect ? Why, all this we allow was done by our blessed Lord with regard to the apostles ; and affirm that their commission in our text is to be understood to this purpose, and not concerning the

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power of *remitting* or *retaining sins* in the literal sense.

If we will judge how the apostles themselves understood their commission, by the work in which they chiefly employ'd themselves; it will be easy to see, that they understood it to mean the preaching that gospel, upon the reception or rejection of which men shou'd be finally happy or unhappy. And when Christ chose them to be the first preachers of a doctrine, far from being favourable to the interests of designing men, or the pleasures of the voluptuous; which for its naked simplicity would be despised by some, and must expect to meet with opposition from those in every nation, who were prejudiced in favour of sentiments and customs already in fashion; it was in great wisdom that he conferred on them the Holy Ghost: for hereby they were not only let into a more clear and comprehensive view of his whole counsel, and better establish'd in it, than under their remaining prejudices they cou'd otherwise have been; but were likewise furnished with extraordinary powers, for proving the certainty of their mission from him, and the certainty likewise of their delivering his true mind and will. These powers they accordingly exercis'd on proper occasions, as appears by their history: but all in subserviency to their grand work of preaching the gospel, and promoting in that way the interest of their master's kingdom. In which work they employ'd so much of their time; that if they had had any notion of the necessity of auricular confessions and authorita-

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tive absolutions, which it is plain they had not ; yet it wou'd have been impossible for them to attend the service, tho' of all men in the world the fittest for it, because of that power of *discerning spirits*, which among other gifts of the Holy Ghost was imparted to them. And can any man believe, that the apostles understood the words in our text concerning authoritative absolutions ; and that yet we shou'd have no account in the new testament of the thousands who must daily have flock'd to them in confession ? What ! not come to the apostles for absolution ! who received immediately, from their master's own mouth, the authority to grant it ! No : the apostles had taught no such doctrine ; having no notion that their master meant any thing like it : and therefore no wonder the people followed no such practice.

Indeed, we need only consider the words of mission, compared with the apostles practice, and that of their Lord himself who sent them, to convince us what was the work, in which Christ design'd they should be employ'd, when he sent them forth. The words of mission are : *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.* Now I ask ; What was the errand, upon which Christ here sent his apostles ? Was it to sit privately in judgment upon men's secret sins, and to enjoin them penances according to their own will and pleasure, and then give them absolution ? Or was it to publish to the world his gospel, *with the demonstration of the Spirit and power* ; that gospel, which himself had taught them, and which he had assured them the Holy Ghost

Ghost * *should bring to their remembrance?* One wou'd think, that Christ himself plainly enough told his apostles what was the errand upon which he sent them, by saying, that *as his Father sent him, even so he sent them.* For Christ in the whole tenor of his ministry declared, that the Father sent him to make known unto men his counsel for their salvation; and that it wou'd have its effect in the salvation of those who embraced it, and the destruction of those who shou'd reject it: and this no doubt was the errand, upon which he sent his apostles. This is indeed visible beyond doubt in the two other places, where Christ's commission to his disciples is recorded: and therefore to them we ought to have recourse for explaining the figurative expressions in our text. *Mark XVI. 15, 16. Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be condemned.* The other passage, *Matt. XXVIII.* is more to our present purpose in one respect; as it is prefaced, like our text itself, with the mention of Christ's own mission from the Father, attended with powers which no man will be so extravagant as to affirm he communicated to others. *All power is given unto me in heaven and earth: go ye therefore, and teach all nations, &c.* This was the errand upon which the apostles were sent; *the teaching men to obey whatsoever Christ had commanded:* and this work, he signifies, it was his mind shou'd be carried on *even unto the end of the world,* by

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* John XIV. 26.

promising his presence and blessing to all those in any age who shou'd teach the same doctrine. But it will no more follow from hence, that those others in succeeding ages should be attended with all the same powers with which the apostles were attended, than that the apostles themselves had *all power in heaven and earth* given to them, as Christ declares in the beginning of this passage they were given to him.

But farther : the interpretation which I have given of my text, with regard to the awful effects of the apostles preaching, is confirmed by the words of St. Paul, 2 Cor. II. 15, 16. which are very near as strong in the phraseology, as those in the text itself. *We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish : to the one we are the savour of death unto death ; and to the other the savour of life unto life.* And 'tis to the same purpose, that the same apostle speaks of *his gospel*, i. e. the gospel which he preached, as that, *according to which God would hereafter judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.* Rom. II. 16.

And, that this is the true meaning of *remitting and retaining sins* in my text, appears plainly from that other text, press'd by the council of Trent into the service of authoritative absolutions ; Matt. XVI. 19. where the power of *binding and loosing* is evidently the same as that of *retaining and remitting sins* in my text ; and the giving unto Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven leads us to the true meaning of *binding and loosing*, and consequently explains the *remitting*

ting and retaining sins, spoken of in my text. The giving unto Peter *the keys of the kingdom of heaven* manifestly receives its explication from his having the honour first to preach the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven after our Lord's resurrection and ascension, whereby that kingdom was established. Whoever was first after this establishment employ'd to preach the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven, might very well be said, as it were, to open the gates of that kingdom, by *the keys* given him for that purpose. Now it is observable, that as some one person must be first in opening the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven; so the grant of *the keys* was made to one person; to *Peter* alone, and never to any other: but the power of *binding and loosing*, mention'd in the same verse, and in *Matt. XVIII*, and that of *remitting and retaining sins*, in *John XX*. were granted to all the rest of the apostles in conjunction with him: and therefore that trite phrase, of *the power of the keys*, confounded as it is with the power of *binding and loosing*, *remitting and retaining*, and applied to authoritative decisions of ecclesiastical men, plainly appears to have no foundation.

But tho' the grant of *the keys* is not the same thing as the *binding and loosing*, presently after mentioned; yet it leads to the true meaning of it. Christ assures *Peter*, that in his preaching he should be enabled so effectually to deliver the terms, on which the Most High would receive sinners to mercy, as that no persons upon earth who comply'd with those terms should fail of being forgiven; and so to denounce the
 wrath

wrath of God against the unbelieving and disobedient, that whoever should reject his doctrine, and despise the authority upon which it was founded, should not obtain pardon. This is the plain meaning of the promise made to *Peter*, that *what he should bind upon earth, should be bound in heaven, and what he should loose on earth, should be loosed in heaven*. Now since this *binding and loosing* is the same as *retaining and remitting sins*, and is in the promise to *Peter* intimately connected with preaching the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven: the true meaning of *binding and loosing*, and consequently of *retaining and remitting sins* by virtue of a commission from Christ, must be preaching that doctrine, according to the tenor of which men should have their sins either *remitted* or *retained* by the great Judge of all. And well might they, who were sent with a special commission from Christ, to preach that gospel, according to the reception of which the condition of its hearers was to be finally determined; well might they, I say, in a figurative manner of speech, be said by their preaching to *bind* upon the rejecters of it their great *sin* in rejecting it, or in the language of our text, *to retain their sins*; and to *loose those from their sins*, or *remit their sins to them*, who embraced a gospel which expressly promises forgiveness to all that embrace it. In a literal sense the words are not capable of being taken, without great absurdity, and encroaching upon the prerogative of God. And the sense in which I have explain'd them agrees so perfectly with a number of other scriptures which are clear to
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the same purpose, and with the character and conduct of the apostles, to whom the commission was given; as plainly shews this to be the true meaning. And thus the whole Romish doctrine of authoritative absolution, built upon the perversion of our Saviour's words, at once falls to the ground.

If we were to consider that other passage, where *binding and loosing* are mention'd; I mean * *Matt. XVIII.* we shou'd find that it is as far from the purpose of the Romish sacrament of penance, as those already considered; tho' it is certain it has a relation to sins committed by christian brethren, whereas the others relate to the effects of preaching the gospel. It is somewhat uncertain, whether the words were directed to the apostles alone; or to other disciples with them. But if it was to the apostles alone; yet 'tis plain it was not in their apostolical character, but as subjects in general of *the kingdom of heaven*, mention'd in the beginning of the chapter; and relates to trespasses committed by one christian against another. In which cases, our Saviour, instead of sending the offender to confess to a priest, advises the person offended to go, and in a kind and gentle manner to admonish his brother, in order to reclaim him from his sin. Upon failure

* *Matt. XVIII. 15—18.* Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more; that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily, I say unto you: whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.

lure of success in this charitable attempt, he is directed to take with him one or two more ; still with the same design, but so ordered as to carry more force with the admonition. If this is likewise unsuccessful ; then *the church*, i. e. a society of the faithful, is to be acquainted with the affair : and if the admonition of the church, acting suitably to the known mind of Christ its lawgiver, is rejected ; our Lord signifies, that the good admonition, given so agreeably to the duty of those that gave it, and so wickedly rejected by the offender, will *bind* his sin upon him ; and that their judgment in separating from him, shall be confirm'd *in heaven*. And he further signifies, that their judgment would likewise be ratified in heaven, if upon good evidence of his repentance he shou'd be restored to their communion. But still, in this, as well as in preaching the gospel before mentioned, there must be understood some rule, some certain rule, of the mind of Christ, laid down and observed, before the effect of *binding* or *loosing* can take place. The thing is not left to the will and pleasure, of the preacher in the one case, or of the offended person, or even the church itself, in the other : but the mind of the lawgiver, regarded or not regarded, is that which *looses* a person from his sins, or *binds* them upon him ; tho', according to the phraseology of scripture, it is in a figurative sense ascribed to the instrument or means, by which this *binding* or *loosing* is effected. And in this sense St. * *Paul*, speaking of a person, from whom, for a
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* 2 Cor. II. 5---11.

notorious offence, the church of *Corinth* had withdrawn, and who had afterwards given sufficient proofs of sincere repentance, advises the *Corinthians* to forgive him; and declares that he forgave him also; and that whom ever he had forgiven on their account, he had done it in the person of *Christ*, i. e. by his authority, and under the infallible assurance of his approbation.

Thus, I think, are the words of my text fairly rescued from that false gloss which the council of *Trent* had put upon them. But there are other texts, to which they have recourse for supporting their pretensions. Particularly, * they force into the service of their sacrament of penance the words of *St. Paul*, 1 Cor. V. 11, 12. wherein he advises the christians of the church of *Corinth* not to keep company with any brother who is a fornicator, or covetous, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; giving this reason for it; (which, because it contains the word *judge* in it, is greedily snatch'd at) *For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?* But the bare recital of this text, in its proper connexion, is sufficient to shew, that it relates to open faults, to which a publick censure is due; and has no relation to auricular confession or priestly absolution.

'Tis as little to the purpose that † they quote the words of the same apostle to the *Ephefians*, chap. II. ver. 3. wherein he tells them, that *they had been children of wrath, even as others:*

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* Con. Trid. Sefs. XIV. cap. 2.

† Cap. 5.

for they suggest no manner of reason for confessing sins privately to a priest ; which is the whole tenor of that chapter of the *Trent* council, where this text is quoted.

As little is it to the purpose, that the new testament expressions, of *violating the temple of God*, 1 Cor. III. 17. *grieving the holy Spirit of God*, Eph. IV. 30. *doing despoight unto the Spirit of grace*, Heb. X. 29. and *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath*, Rom. II. 5. are * produced to shew, that they who have sinned after baptism should submit to whatever penance the priest shall be pleased to enjoin as a satisfaction for their sins.

Nor is it a whit more to the purpose, that the † *Profession of catholic faith*, lately publish'd in the *English* tongue, for the reception of converts into the church of Rome, refers us to the old law, ' as a figure of the law of Christ,' to favour the Romish doctrine and practice of confession. For, what if leprosy was a figure of sin ? What if the leprous were obliged, by the express command of an abrogated dispensation, to shew themselves to the priests ? Will it thence follow, that under the new testament christians must, without any command or direction from Christ their law-giver, confess their sins to a priest, and take absolution from him ? What if the *Israelites* were ‡ obliged to make confession, when they had been guilty of a trespass, in defrauding their neighbours, or taking away their property by violence ? What if after restitution atonement was according to the Mosaic

law

* Cap. 8.

† Page 22.

‡ Num. V. 5--8. Lev. VI. 2--7.

law to be made by a priest? Yet this will never prove, that under the gospel, which acknowledges no priest but Christ himself, christians are obliged to confess to a minister their secret sins; or that forgiveness at the hand of God depends upon a mortal man's absolution. What if upon St. Paul's preaching the gospel, attended *with the demonstration of the spirit and of power*, by the miracles which he wrought, * *many who believed came publickly, and confessed, and shewed their deeds?* as, upon the preaching of John the baptist, † *Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, went out to him, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.* Do these things lay any obligation upon those who are already become christians, to confess their sins privately to a priest, and kneel down before him for pardon? And lastly; how vile is the perversion of that text, Jam. V. 16. and how wisely did this catechist act, in concealing the greatest part of the verse? for the whole verse runs thus: *Confess your faults one to another; and pray for one another; the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* Now what colour of a reason is there to believe, that *confessing to one another*, in order to mutual forgiveness, could mean confessing to the *elders of the church*, mention'd in a quite different case in the preceding verses? The same persons are bid to *confess their faults to one another*, who are likewise bid to *pray for one another*: and therefore if the people are by this text

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directed

* Acts XIX. 18.

† Matt. III. 5, 6.

directed to *confess* to the priests, the priests are likewise directed to *confess* to the people ; if the priests are bid to *pray for* the people, so are the people bid to *pray for* the priests. And I am intirely of opinion ; that the prayer here described, *the * inwrought prayer of a righteous man*, even though he never were in orders, would be as much regarded at the throne of grace, and become as effectual for the forgiveness of an offence committed against himself and confess'd to him, as if he were possessed of the highest honours the church of *Rome* itself is able to confer.

Thus we have seen how little there is in the numerous passages I have been considering, to the purpose for which the Romanists produce them : that they really mean quite other things than they bring them to prove. We have seen in particular, that there is not in the words of my text, on which the greatest stress is laid, any authoritative power of absolution committed unto men ; nor any confession to a priest instituted ; tho' the council of *Trent* says it contains both. We have seen, that what they interpret concerning the power of granting or withholding the pardon of sin by bishops and priests, was meant by our Saviour concerning the awful effects of preaching his gospel by the apostles, under the infallible guidance of the Holy Ghost. We have seen, that our Saviour could not be capable of putting such a sense upon his own words, as the council of *Trent* has put ; because it is inconsistent with the authority of God's own government.

* *ἵνα τις ἐνεργὴς ᾖ.*

government. And an intimation has likewise been given of the dangerous tendency of that minute and particular confession, which the church of *Rome* requires the people to make to the priests, of the most secret sins, together with their circumstances. But the dangerous tendency of this, and likewise of their doctrine of absolution, deserves a little more of our attention.

It has been already observed, that according to the circumstances in which confession is established in the church of *Rome*, there is the utmost danger of violating all rules of modesty and decency ; by putting questions, under pretence of searching sin to the bottom, which shall suggest wicked thoughts to the minds of young and unexperienc'd persons, such as otherwise wou'd never have enter'd there. But besides this ; auricular confession is directly calculated, as there is no doubt it was design'd, to put the poor penitent wholly in the priest's power, with regard to estate, and reputation, and even life itself. The laity, I say, must in all these respects be intirely at the mercy of the clergy, if they can be brought to make it a point of conscience to confess to them all their failings. And to what purpose is it for the canon law to tell us, * ' that ' if a priest reveals what he hears in confession, ' he shall be deposed, and wander about in disgrace all the rest of his life ' ? If a priest who is himself *under* the guilt of *mortal sin* shou'd be so wicked as to break his oath of secrecy ; it wou'd be no very great wonder. And in that case, what

* Dist. vii. de poenit. cap. 2.

what reparation can the sending him to travel abroad make for the unspeakable mischiefs of his perjured treachery? In the mean time, where is the probability, that the Son of God, who had so tender an affection for his whole church, as to *purchase it with his own blood*, wou'd lay it under the hard necessity of such an intire dependence upon its officers?

Then, as to the doctrine of absolution: I beseech you to consider, how directly that tends to the destruction of all morality and piety, all virtue and serious religion. For, how strong a temptation must it be to a man vitiously disposed, to be taught, that a priest, whom he may hope some way or other to influence, can absolve him from most crimes to which his wicked heart is inclined? however, that his bishop can do it; or at the worst, that the pope can do it: and that the great judge of all has so far put the matter out of his own power, that he must confirm in heaven the judicial sentence which shall be pass'd in his favour here upon earth? What regard, I say, will such a man pay to the judgment of the Almighty? what sense of religion will he retain towards him? or what sense of the natural obligations of virtue in his conduct towards men? How will he despise the doctrine of the necessity of restraining corrupt affections in order to be truly happy? All thoughts of this kind will be treated with the utmost contempt, when he considers, that, according to the doctrine of the infallible church, he need only put on an appearance of contrition, confess the sin he has committed or resolved upon,

on, submit to the penance enjoin'd, and receive absolution; and that then, having made satisfaction for his sin, he is a clear man, and may go on in a course of the like actions, without any necessity of a real reformation. Thus the whole process of the Romish sacrament of penance has a tendency to make men regard external performances as an equivalent for inward and real religion, to draw off their minds from attending to it, and at length to extinguish the sense of it.

And the tendency this way is the more evident, when we consider, that in the article of death, as we have already seen, all priests are obliged to absolve from all sins without exception. This the wicked layman knows beforehand: and may thereby be encouraged to indulge himself in all manner of sins, in the expectation of receiving absolution at last, and the viaticum of the eucharist into the bargain: both of which the * priests of the church of *Rome* are, under pain of ecclesiastical censure, obliged to give to those who are dying by distempers, and likewise to malefactors just before their execution, if they desire it.

The papists indeed, and particularly the author or authors of the † catechism already quoted, do not fail to charge some protestants with undertaking to absolve dying penitents in a solemn manner, as by authority from Christ. But this I shall not meddle with; my business being to consider the doctrine of absolution

* Instit. jur. canon. lib. II. tit. 5.

† Prof. of cath. faith, pag. 21.

absolution as it stands in the church of *Rome*. Now, besides the natural tendency of their doctrine for encouraging sin in the course of life ; I would intreat you to consider, with regard to a dying sinner under trouble of mind ; which is the wiser and better method, which more agreeable to the character and duty of a christian minister, and more likely to administer real comfort where there is room for it : to declare to him the abundant goodness, and yet the perfect purity and rectitude of the divine being ; to give him necessary instructions concerning the disposition which God requires, mingled with assurance of his mercy to the truly penitent ; to acquaint him with the gospel terms of forgiveness, and exhort and encourage him to comply with them ; and then, with hearty prayers for him, to leave him to the mercies of God, and the reflections of his own mind : or to hear his confession, and then say ;* *I absolve thee from all censures and sins, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.*

But if all profess'd ministers of Christ were to act thus consistently with the principles of their religion ; if they were to take no more upon them than to explain and exhort, to lay the scripture doctrine before the people, and labour to bring them to a compliance with its directions : *the power of the keys, the power of binding and loosing, of remitting and retaining sins*, and in short, the whole power of the church of *Rome*, would be demolish'd, which they are resolved shall at any rate be kept up. Ex-
plications,

* Ritual. Roman, pag. 67.

plications, and exhortations, and the ministering of spiritual comforts, or of divine warnings separate from human terrors, are thought too mean employments for men, who think themselves so capable of disposing God's favours, as to pretend to determine what punishments in this life shall avail to the pardon of sin. Of this I have given you a general account already, relating to their doctrine of satisfaction. Give me leave now, in the conclusion, to remind you of that doctrine: wherein they teach, that * we
 ' may satisfy God the Father thro' Jesus Christ,
 ' not only by punishments, of our own accord
 ' undertaken for revenging of sin, or imposed
 ' by the will of the priest, according to the
 ' measure of the crime; but also by temporal
 ' scourges, inflicted of God, and patiently borne
 ' by us.' In pursuance of this doctrine it must be, that in one of their forms of absolution, already quoted from their ritual, they join ' what-
 ' ever evils the penitent himself has suffered,
 ' with the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, to-
 ' wards his obtaining remission of sins, and the
 ' reward of eternal life.' In pursuance of this doctrine they have an extraordinary law, peculiar to themselves, express'd in the words of pope *Clement III.* and inserted in the † body of the canon law: wherein it is decreed, with regard to ' those who shall take publick prostitutes
 ' out of the stews, and marry them, that this
 ' shall avail to the forgiveness of their sins:'

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* Con. Trid. Sess. XIV. cap. 9.

† Inter opera charitatis non minimum est, errantem ab erroris semita revocare. Statuimus, ut omnibus, qui publicas mulieres de lupanari extraxerint, et duxerint in uxores; quod agunt, in remissionem proficiat peccatorum. *Decr. Gregor. lib. IV. tit. 1. cap. 20.*

and that for this reason ; ‘ that among works of
 ‘ charity it is none of the least to call back wan-
 ‘ derers from the error of their ways.’ To this do-
 ctine likewise has been owing the senseless super-
 stition of pilgrimages, to our Lady of *Loretto*, to
 St. *Jago di Compostella*, to the holy sepulchre, and
 a number of other sanctified persons and places.
 In which pilgrimages, many of them imposed in
 penance, as well as others voluntary, men have
 left their families, squander’d away their estates,
 destroy’d their health, and usefulness, and often
 life itself. *Erasmus* has, with inimitable spirit
 and judgment, expos’d these follies. I mention
 them, and the other particulars before named,
 as amazing instances of the presumption of the
 Romish clergy, and of the real power accruing
 to them by boldly persevering in that pre-
 sumption. They take to themselves the preroga-
 tive of God, in declaring that such and such
 things shall avail to the pardon of sins, when
 God himself has made no such promise. And,
 as we have before seen, they have the impious
 presumption to ascribe reconciliation with God
 to their own arbitrary absolutions. They make
 the effect of absolution itself to depend upon
 their own kind intention. They will not allow
 that the Most High can refuse what they grant,
 or grant what they have a mind to refuse. And
 yet all this is cover’d with the specious pretence
 of divine authority and commission. In con-
 sequence of all this, they lay upon the people
 what injunctions they please, by way of satis-
 faction for sin : and the inconsiderate people,
 concluding that these must be extraordinary men
 indeed, who persist in the claim of such ex-
 traordinary

traordinary powers as by commission from God himself, and who appeal to scripture for it, which scripture they themselves are not permitted to look into ; are before they are aware hurried into an acknowledgment of their spiritual powers, and an obedience to all their injunctions. Which obedience is indeed the more easy, because the things on which the church of *Rome* lays the greatest stress in this doctrine of satisfaction, are visibly such as may be complied with by men of carnal minds ; who will submit to any chastisements and external difficulties, provided they may be excused from the trouble of subduing and mortifying corrupt inclinations. Let them but have their way here, and they will give up all power into the hands of the clergy : and so likewise will weak ignorant people of better principles, in the hopes of having eternal happiness secured to them by these favourites of heaven.

And thus is the very point gained, to which the ambitious clergy turn their whole views. Power, extensive temporal power, is the darling object of these men's desires. And they enlarge their claims on a spiritual account, on purpose to increase their power in a temporal respect ; going on from one step to another, till they seem to think themselves as gods over the rest of the world. These are the men, who are for crushing all such as in the least differ from the fashionable doctrines and ceremonies, to which they themselves are indebted for their grandeur : and, instead of softening matters, out of a tender regard to their brethren's weakness, as by virtue of their character they are

obliged to do, take advantage of every little difference, to aggrandize themselves by widening the breach. They encourage the imposing of needless difficulties upon their brethren ; whereby they prevent much of their usefulness to the state ; and when once such burdens are laid on, they can never find a seasonable or proper time to have them removed, but employ all their influence to keep them fast bound. I might have added ; that they are not content to lay smaller difficulties upon their brethren ; but that they persecute with the utmost cruelty, even unto death, for meer differences in speculation ; so little can they bear to be look'd on as any thing less than masters of the consciences of all mankind. But the cruelty of the Romish persecutions is a copious subject : and is committed to one, who I doubt not will handle it to your satisfaction.

When men arrogate thus to themselves the prerogative of the divine Being, and even a superiority to him, pretending that he cannot forgive where they do not or will not ; and when it appears that in all these pretensions they chiefly aim at temporal power ; no wonder that deism abounds ; no wonder, that in *Rome* particularly, the seat of the pope, who of all others arrogates the highest power to himself, there are so many deists, and so many atheists. If this be christianity, it is natural for a man to say, I will be any thing else rather than a christian. And even in protestant countries ; by how much the more the power of the priests in these respects is cried up, by so much the more danger

is there of men's casting off all regards to the christian religion.

For the improvement of what you have been hearing, let me intreat you to be thankful to God; whose great goodness bestows upon you the inestimable blessing of liberty to consult his word, for your instruction and comfort. By this sacred record, which you have in your own hands, you are taught quite other doctrine concerning repentance and remission of sins, confession and absolution, than the church of *Rome* teaches. Be exhorted to follow the directions there laid down. And let not what you have now heard, concerning the corruptions of the church of *Rome*, keep you back, but rather excite you, to a serious confession of your sins before God, with abhorrence of them, and resolutions and the most earnest endeavours against them. Let it excite you to seek absolution from that great and wise, that just and yet gracious governor, whom by your sins you have offended, and
 * *with whom alone there is forgiveness, that he may be feared.* Be not afraid to go to God himself, in the name of Jesus Christ. Ask of him the pardon of your sins: and you will not be denied. Let it be the sincere desire of your hearts, and endeavour of your lives, to please him: and whenever in any respect you have offended him, do not cherish or palliate the evil of which you have been guilty: do not plead for it, or harbour it in your affections; and dare not to repeat it in your practice: but humble yourselves before him against whom you have

* Psal. CXXX. 4.

have sinned: implore his mercy in the forgiveness of it, and his gracious assistance to get rid of its power. And whereinfoever you have offended against your fellow creatures; if the offence requires a particular acknowledgment, make that acknowledgment to him whom you have offended, and make all the reparation you are able: and if he has a grain of goodness in him, he will do his duty in a hearty forgiveness: however you will not fail of acceptance with God, and of that peace and comfort, which naturally follow the discharge of your own duty. If any man has by his follies so involv'd himself, that he knows not how to direct his conduct: let him consult any wise and good man, whether minister or not minister, it matters not; and get all the assistance he can for his guidance, and for restoring the comfort of his mind. Such a confession as this, upon extraordinary occasions, no serious christian, of any denomination whatever, can think improper. But then remember: that you are to follow this advice so far only, as it shall approve itself to your own deliberate judgment, from its conformity to reason and scripture: that a grave experienced person, of any employment in life, may be very useful by his advice: but that no man, of any character, can oblige you to follow it in obedience to him; or, without breaking in upon the authority of God himself, pretend to give absolution from sin upon such obedience, as the Romish priests do.

If I am speaking to any of the deluded votaries of that corrupt church; I wou'd most earnestly intreat them to satisfy their minds with true

true repentance towards God, restitution to their neighbour, and real amendment of life; without any anxiety about confessing to a priest, or receiving his absolution. Be so good to your own souls, as to believe the words of Christ himself; who does not insist upon such penances and satisfactions as your priests lay upon you:

** Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest: † Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.* You want no other mediator to appear before God in your behalf; no priest, to make or to repeat that atonement, which he himself has completely made already, and which he made || *once for all.* *He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* He has directed his apostle to assure us, *that ‡ if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* And herein he does not make that difference which the council of Trent makes; of sins before, and sins after baptism. Nor is there in this, or any other text in the whole new testament, any mention or intimation of the necessity of confession to a priest, or of submitting to his arbitrary penances, in order to absolution. The confession is to be made to God; as the absolution is to come from him.

To conclude. Let us all, both ministers and people, converse daily with the sacred oracles; which will be our surest defence against corruptions of all kinds. My reverend brethren in the ministry, I am satisfied, are too wise to be displeased

* Matt. xi. 28.

|| Heb. x. 10. ix. 12.

† John vi. 37.

‡ 1 John i. 9.

pleased at being put in mind of the importance of this duty : its importance to their establishment as christians and protestants, and to their usefulness as ministers. And if christians in general would make it their practice to study the scriptures with impartial minds, we should have no alarms of popery : for so long as this practice is kept up, it is impossible that the corrupt doctrines of the church of *Rome* should be entertain'd.

F I N I S.

Printed for J. NOON,

TWO Sermons : *The one against the traditions of the church of Rome ; the other about the right manner of attending for the christian faith :* preached at Barbican in London, October 15. and 22. M DCC XXXII. on occasion of collecting for the relief of the persecuted Protestants of Saltzburg. By JOSEPH BURROUGHS.

Sermons preached on several occasions, by JAMES BURROUGHS.

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